

In Honor

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In Honor

April fifteenth. Your birthday.

Zelena opens her eyes and blinks once. Twice. The alarm clock on the table reads 5:24 AM—she's only managed to sleep for a few hours. With a groan, she lifts herself off the cot she'd managed to find in the basement and stretches her stiff neck, shaking her head and clearing the dreadful feeling from her mind that she'd woken up with. After a week and a half in the Underworld, she'd expected the almighty heroes to have come up with a plan to get home by now. And yet there they were, still scraping around and making feeble attempts, and it's already April fifteenth and they're no closer to—

She stiffens. And she remembers why she'd woken up in the first place.

April fifteenth. Your birthday. Just thought you might want to know.

His voice echoes in her mind as she stands and checks the calendar on the wall. There it is, in rigid black ink. _15_. She immediately decides she dislikes the number.

"Well then," she mumbles to herself. "A happy birthday to me."

She's never had the experience of a true birthday before. Every year previously she'd recognized the day of her mother giving her up, of her abandonment—but never her actual birth. It seems almost fruitless now after all those years of grief.

And yet Zelena walks to her wardrobe, pulls on a fresh set of clothes, and walks determinedly out the front door to head into the center of town. If it's her birthday, she's damn well going to see her daughter no matter what. She needs this. She needs to feel something other than the stinging isolation she's been handed.

She catches Regina at the diner with Emma and Henry. The Charmings are, thankfully, absent, and Zelena steels herself for a civil confrontation.

Her sister's head looks up at the chime of the door in surprise. "Zelena," she says. "This isâ€|unexpected." Emma and Henry follow Regina's line of sight to where she's standing and she crosses the room to their booth.

"Regina," Zelena says, attempting to keep her voice steady, "I'd like to see my daughter today. Please."

Emma idly sips on her mug of cocoa to avoid the conversation. Regina sighs and already Zelena can tell she's about to say no. "Zelenaâ€"

"Regina, _please_. All I'm asking is for ten minutes. I need to see her. Please."

Her sister looks at Emma for just a moment and starts to open her mouth again when, to the surprise of everyone at the table, Henry interjects.

"Come on, Mom," he says. "Ten minutes can't hurt. It's her baby too, isn't it?"

Zelena's almost tempted to smile gratefully at the boy but instead watches Regina's face as she silently contemplates her son's plea. It's several moments before she finally nods and wordlessly leads them out of the diner.

"I'm not sure where Robin's location is," Regina says as they head towards the edge of the forest. "But we decided that if we needed to communicate, I'd send up a fireball and he would come to us."

Zelena says nothing in response. The small group stays quiet as they continue their trek and eventually reach the forest's edge. Regina steps forward once before conjuring a ball of flames in her hand and sending it straight up in the air; simultaneously Emma lets off a loud whistle to accompany its ascent.

They wait several minutes and she has to resist the urge to pace. It wouldn't help her situation if they saw she was agitated.

Finally Robin emerges after twenty minutes and Zelena's heart jumps when she sees her baby in his arms. _She's safe_, she tells herself.

Robin's face hardens when he sees her. "What's she doing here?"

Regina lays a patient hand on his arm. "She asked to see the baby, just for a little bit."

He shoots her a glare. "Didn't we all decide it would be best to keep her away from you? And now you just want to jeopardize her safety again?"

"Robin, she just wants to see her daughter," Emma says abruptly, almost irritably. The Savior fixes the two with a look. "Just let her hold her child, for God's sake."

The hunter swallows once and nods, taking a step in Zelena's direction. She carefully strides forward and murmurs a hushed, "Thank you," to Emma before coming to a stop in front of him. Her hands are practically shaking with the effort to not rip the bundle right out of his hands. She waits the agonizing few seconds it takes for Robin to transfer the infant but as soon as she's in her arms, the world feels immediately right again. She lets out a breath she didn't realize she'd been holding in.

"Hello, little one," she whispers to her daughter. Blue eyes blink back up at her and Zelena feels her heart swell in her chest.

Emma taps her on the shoulder to get her attention. "I'll make sure you get some time. We'll be over there if you need us." She points to a collection of rocks a few yards away.

Zelena nods and briefly wonders why the Savior, of all people, would be helping her. She'd sided with Regina before on this matter, so why allow her this small freedom? Nevertheless, Emma ushers the other three away and although it's not completely private, she's alone with her daughter for the first time in what feels like ages.

She rocks her gently, adores the feel of her in her arms again. A hand manages to escape the confines of the blanket and Zelena vanishes her glove so her baby can grasp her finger. She smiles and feels the onslaught of tears behind her eyes.

"She really is beautiful," a voice behind her says, and the air in her lungs practically freezes.

Zelena turns. Hades is standing a few feet away, a soft look on his face. She glances toward her sister and Emma in alarm but they don't seem to notice anything that's going on.

"It's alright, they can't see me," he says. He takes a step forward. "You're the only one who can see me. Just keep your eyes on the baby and they won't suspect a thing."

She swallows thickly, her gaze focused on the child in her arms and she's finding it difficult not to glance up at him. "What are you doing here?" she asks faintly.

Hades' smile is evident in his voice. "I wanted to see you. It is your birthday, after all." Zelena can hear him step forward again.

"It's just another day," she argues. "Why would anybody care about that?" About me?

He doesn't reply and for a moment she can't hear him anymore. She looks up and realizes he's no longer in front of her.

And then she feels the touch of a warm hand on her shoulder.

"I care," Hades says quietly. "I care very much."

Zelena feels the sting of tears again. "Why?" she hears herself ask.

The hand on her shoulder squeezes gently. "You know why."

They fall silent and Zelena shifts the infant in her arms, stroking the baby's cheek and forehead with a finger to distract herself from the rapid beating of her heart.

"Beautiful," she hears him say, his voice very close to her ear. "Just like her mother."

Her eyes close. His hand is still in its place on her shoulder, warm and reassuring. And just for a moment, she lets everything else fade away. She lets herself believe that this, this warmth and happiness she's feeling in her chest, is reality. That her baby is safe, that the gentle hand on her shoulder is hers alone to feel. That the love in her heart threatening to overwhelm her is finally able to be shown to the world.

"I think the heroes are getting restless," Hades says, almost inaudibly, as if he's reluctant to pull her from her thoughts. She opens her eyes and indeed, Regina and Robin are standing from their respective seats and making quick glances between themselves and the baby.

Zelena holds back a sigh. "It was only a matter of time," she mutters. "Can't be happy forever."

"You deserve to be." He steps to her left and her vision is suddenly taken over by him leaning in close. "You deserve to be happy, always."

She doesn't know how to respond. A knot starts forming in her throat and one traitorous tear makes its way down her cheek. Hades leans even further in, wiping it away with a light stroke of his thumb.

"Happy birthday, Zelena," he whispers, and kisses her cheek delicately before stepping back and vanishing into the forest. Her heart is thumping wildly in her chest and for once, it's not out of fear or anguish. And she lets that feeling fill her from head to toe as she presses her lips to her baby's forehead, reveling in the sensation.

Her blissful moment of peace is interrupted by Robin stalking towards her, his arms held out and ready to receive the infant. Zelena does the one thing she hates more than anything in the world: she hands her baby, her world, back to the hunter without complaint. She avoids their gazes and walks away, resisting the urge to glance back. _It'll only make it harder_, she tells herself. And she does everything she can to keep that rapidly diminishing warmth in her chest.

As far as first birthdays go, she surmises as she climbs the steps to her temporary home, it could've gone much worse. At the very least,

she'd been able to see her child. That would have to be enough.

As she switches on the light, a piece of paper is illuminated against the dark finish of the dining room table. A familiar script meets her eyes and she picks it up.

It'll be like that again soon. I promise.

She closes her eyes again, feels the touch of his hand and the warmth of her baby in her arms. And God, she wants more than anything to believe him.

Zelena falls asleep clutching the paper to her chest, dreaming of Hades' soft voice and the reassuring weight of her daughter against her.

April fifteenth. Your birthday.

Zelena reluctantly opens her eyes to the stream of sunlight coming through the window. She blinks once. Twice. The alarm clock on her nightstand reads 6:04 AM. She lets out a sigh and pushes her cheek further into her pillow, remembering the words from her dream.

A very familiar arm suddenly wraps around her waist and she's pulled close to the warm body next to her. She smiles when she feels a kiss pressed to her neck.

"Happy birthday, Zelena," Hades murmurs, his voice laden with sleep but still full of reverence.

She hums in contentment as she laces her fingers through his, feels his arm tighten the slightest bit around her. "Thank you," she answers softly. He kisses her neck again ever so delicately and that content feeling in her chest blossoms even further.

The sound of a door opening and the telltale pitter-patter of feet are enough to make Zelena open her eyes again. Clear blue eyes meet hers and there's a flash of curls before she finds her daughter tucked into her side, all cold toes and soft fingers and absolute perfection.

"Hi, Mummy," she says in a too-loud whisper.

"Hi, sweet pea," Zelena whispers back, smiling and kissing the girl's forehead.

"Is it your birthday, Mummy?" she asks, even though Zelena knows Hades told her yesterday when he thought she wasn't looking.

She tickles the soft skin of her daughter's tummy. "Yes it is, darling."

"What do you want for your birthday?"

Zelena pretends to think about it and feels, rather than hears, Hades' chuckle against her.

"You know," she says, tapping her chin, "I think I'd like to go back to sleep. Can that be my present?"

Her daughter looks at her very seriously and, summoning all her child-like authority, answers, "Yes." She snuggles into Zelena's chest and she wraps an arm around the small body, Hades' hand joining atop hers.

Soon enough, the room is filled with deep breathing and Zelena takes a moment, reveling in it all: the sun streaming through the curtains, the softness of the sheets and the tangle of limbs surrounding her. She can recall a distant memory, a warmth of this very same nature so long ago that became her only solace in existence. A birthdayâ€"her first birthdayâ€"celebrated in a handful of minutes and not even a fraction of what she feels now.

But that was four years ago.

And now she has everything she's ever wanted.

Hades shifts against her, his light snores filling the air. Her daughter's hand tightens in her nightshirt as she dreams.

Zelena closes her eyes, remembers the voice in her head from all those years past. _April fifteenth. Your birthday_.

She no longer hates the number fifteen.

END

Notes:

I rushed to finish this in time so I apologize for any errors, but I literally could not sleep until this was done. Happy birthday, Zelena! Let's hope you get many more of these wonderful days.

Thank you for reading and, as always, reviews are much appreciated!
:)

End
file.